

Born to Win

Out of Darkness

by: Ronald L. Dart

I find it impossible to criticize a woman like Mother Teresa of Calcutta. You can't find ulterior motives in a person who gives her life in the service of the poorest of the poor, living among them, providing for them. It isn't necessary to explain people like this. It is enough to admire them. What may need explaining, though, is how a woman like Mother Teresa could live her life in doubt, not so much of God, but of God's love for her. It may need explaining, if for no other reason, because so many of us live out our lives in doubt of one kind or another.

Os Guinness, who is a Christian apologist wrote years ago a book called *Of Two Minds*. And he opined that there's a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubts all of us live with. They come and they go. But unbelief is another matter altogether. The Atheists who are making so much noise these days are in a state of settled unbelief. They are, in my opinion, dishonest, because no one can know with certainty that there is no God. How could they ever prove it? They can't. They strike me as men whistling past the graveyard. They dread God and deny his existence as a defense against having to think about him. The honest people are those who admit their doubts. They may, like Sister Teresa, make a hard decision to trust God in spite of any doubts they may have.

There is a new book: *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light (The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta)*. One reviewer said this:

[S]he went forward, answering that divine call, even though the "darkness" and "desolation" within her own soul was deepening, even though "the more I want Him, the less I am wanted by Him," even though "the longing for God is terribly painful, and yet the darkness is becoming greater."

A.G. Gankarski - *The Washington Times* - October 29, 2007

My heart breaks for her. How could anyone so *dedicated* to God's service not *realize* God's love for her? Yet, there is a part of me that understands. It is possible to love Jesus, to serve him, to do what you think he wants you to do, and yet not know him very well at all. He makes it clear enough, in his words, that faith is not a feeling. It's a decision to trust *in spite of* feeling. He makes it clear that his grace can cover the faults and flaws of men. (And, boy, do I ever lean on that.) For most of us, the old hymn *Amazing Grace* is a great comfort. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a *wretch* like me." It's kind of surprising to me, in a way, that that hymn has maintained its love over all the years with so many people, because in modern generations we're not supposed to think of ourselves as "wretches". I honestly think the theology of those old guys was a lot better than some of the theology we have today that's based on self-

esteem.

But it's a truism: human beings have a hard time *accepting* God's mercy and trusting his grace. We just keep on worrying. And I think that may explain why some people have, what shall I call it, a *joyless* Christian life. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Galatians 5

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- 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23 Meekness, self-control: against such there is no law.
24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.
25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

You know, one gets the feeling, in reading the work of Mother Teresa, that all these attributes of the Spirit were found in Teresa except two: peace and joy. She was gentle; she had love; she had goodness, longsuffering, faith, meekness, temperance, all those things. But there was an absence of joy, an absence of peace.

You know, though, the silence of God (which is what she was bemoaning) is not a novel idea. David complained about it clear back in the Psalms. It's a fairly common complaint. He gets worried about the fact that he's off in the dark somewhere. He wrote in the 28th Psalm:

Psalm 28

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- ¹ Unto you will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, if you be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

But doesn't it seem that God *is* largely *silent* to us? Oh, we have the Bible, and that's a lot more than David had. But we still—all of us do—feel forsaken at times. Odd thing, Teresa did not feel that God was silent to her. She heard Jesus ask, in her own words, "Will you refuse?" Is it possible that she never heard in this life, from her Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? She claims she heard him say:

"Will you refuse? When there was a question of your soul, I did not think of myself but gave myself freely on the cross and now, what about you? I want free nuns covered with my poverty of the cross—I want obedient nuns covered with my obedience on the cross. I want full of love nuns covered with my charity of the Cross. Will you refuse to do this for me?"

You know, this does not sound like the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. The difference is subtle, but the difference is important. Here is what the Jesus of Matthew said:

Matthew 4

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- 18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.
19 And he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.
20 And they immediately left their nets, and followed him.

Now, you notice this, he asked no question of these men. He did not say, “Well, are you going to refuse to follow me?” No, he says, “Come with me and here’s the deal—I’ll make you fishers of men.” And then it was their decision whether they would do it or not—and they did. On another occasion:

Matthew 8

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²¹ And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father.

²² But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Notice there’s no equivocation, no casting of guilt. Just a simple command. It took me a while, in reading what Mother Teresa claimed she heard Jesus say before I realized what the difference was. He asked her a question: “Will you refuse?” Why would he ask that? Why would he expect that of her? Why would he lay that *guilt* on her? That he called her to what she’s doing, I would not doubt that for a moment. That she did more good works than I will do in all of my life, oh yes, absolutely. But I don’t think it was Jesus’ intent to cast guilt upon this good woman. On another occasion:

Matthew 16

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²⁴ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

²⁶ For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

I noticed something interesting about all this as I was working my way through it: the word for “follow”. The word for “follow” in the Greek is a combined form that means properly “to be in the same way” with someone—on the same road, to accompany. It isn’t exactly to follow a few steps behind. It is to say, “walk with me.” And did you notice that Jesus said “*if* any man come after me”? There was no casting of guilt if you didn’t; it was your choice. There was no requiring it of you. Here is what’s for you, here’s what you have to do. You don’t *have* to do it, but if you’re going to follow me this is the way it is. Now, what would the Jesus of the Gospel of Mark say?

Mark 10

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¹⁷ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

Now, notice in this story that the initiative *lies with the man*.

Mark 10

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¹⁸ And Jesus said unto him, Why call me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

¹⁹ You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor your father and mother.

Now, this is fascinating. It does not involve any *special revelation*. He said, “*You know* the commandments.” So I can say that if I want to know what God has to say to me, all I’ve got to do is read what has been written down. If I won’t do that, what’s the point in telling me anything else.

Mark 10

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²⁰ And he answered and said unto him, Teacher, all these have I observed from my youth.

²¹ Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

²² And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Now, what’s important about this is: the choice was *left to him*. He could accept or decline. And Jesus did not put this to him in a way designed to make him feel guilty. And, I think, this is what troubles me about Teresa’s Jesus. She desperately wanted his approval, and yet she seems unable to accept that *she had it*. How can I say that she had it? Because it was there in the fruits of her work. Consider what this tiny woman was able to accomplish. She took in hand what Jesus said she should do in the Gospels, and went out to be the agent of it.

So, what do I mean by that? Well, there are three parables in Matthew 25—parables about the last days. It’s the third one I’d like to call your attention to. It begins in verse 31:

Matthew 25

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³¹ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

³² And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:

³³ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Now, what was the criterion for this separation? What was it that actually qualified these people to receive the Kingdom of God? Well, he tells us right here:

Matthew 25

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³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in:

³⁶ Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink?

38 When saw we you a stranger, and took you in? or naked, and clothed you?

39 Or when saw we you sick, or in prison, and came unto you?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Since you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

This ministry, of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and doing all these things for the poorest of the poor—well, this is what she devoted her life to. She started out as an 18-year-old girl. She began in Calcutta, India, teaching English in school. And she began her Calcutta ministry—to the lepers, to the poverty-stricken children of that city—she actually began it *single-handed*—all alone. And after all of her life’s work, she ended up with a broad, wide ministry, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nobel Prize. But what have been far more of a prize to her was she saved lives and earned the eternal gratitude of the children, the lepers, and the poor of Calcutta. I can’t believe that she thought she did that herself. Could she not see God’s approval in the faces of the children? Now, I don’t know what to think of her, and I can’t judge her. I only speak of her to help those people who have experienced this “dark night of the soul”. It may be that you are looking for God to pat you on the head and give you a “well done.” Jesus said this about that:

Luke 17

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7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to eat?

8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready that I may eat, and gird yourself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward you shall eat and drink?

9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

10 So likewise you, when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Now, “unprofitable”, in this context, doesn’t mean you are a *bad* servant. Goodness knows how hard it is to find people who will do merely their duty. What it *does* mean is: you have gained no merit by *merely doing your duty*. In fact, when you have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, actually housed the homeless—when you have done all these things—you have *only done your duty*. You have gained no merit by anything you have done, this is what’s *expected of us*.

Is it possible, then, to feel joy even in the struggle? And how can one be full of love and not full of joy at the same time? Now, I have to resist psychoanalyzing this woman because I’m not qualified. But what she seems to be looking for is to be *wanted* by someone. This expression of her haunts me, she says, “The more I want him, the less I am wanted by him.”

I can’t understand this because I have never felt unwanted by God. How can those words —“When there was a question of your soul, I did not think of myself but gave myself freely on the cross”—how could those words fall on her ears and she still feel unwanted? It seems to me that no greater desire for us could be expressed than the willingness to lay down *his life* for us. Teresa told a priest on one occasion:

Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear.

Mother Teresa to the Rev. Michael Van Der Peet, September 1979 - Come Be My Light

And I can't help wondering: What was she looking for? Was she looking for a mystical *feeling* that God did not provide? Mysticism is a common approach to Christian practice, but it seems singularly unrewarding. Teresa had a need that mysticism could never fill.

Now, I have a confession to make. For me, the presence of Christ is always seen *after the fact*. If I want Christ to speak to me, I go to the Gospels. To borrow an expression from Jesus (in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man): If I won't listen to him in the Gospels, I wouldn't listen if he showed up in my bedroom. I know this is the way he would put it, because of the way he put it in that parable. The Rich Man said, "Oh, go send someone to my brothers. If someone came back from the dead they would listen." And he said, "No. Let them hear Moses. Let them hear the Prophets. If they won't listen to them, they wouldn't hear if someone *rose from the dead* and talked to them. [See Luke 16.]"

It is for this reason that I don't trust the allegations that Jesus spoke to this or that person. He doesn't need to. He already has. And in too many cases, what the person was hearing was their own heart. And that isn't to be trusted either.

All that said, there is something very important to understand here. God shares the decision-making process with us. If we want to do a work for him, if we imagine something that can be accomplished that is worthy, then he is willing to work with us and with our desire. Paul said:

Romans 1

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²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [...]

Now, consider this analogy: God did not create the American Beauty Rose. It was created in 1875 by George Valentine Nash from materials *provided by* God. What *God* created was more than 100 species of *wild roses*. God is a creator and we are made in his image, so he shares the creative process with man. And when he created those 100 species of wild roses he said, "Let's design them in such a way that men can take them and design something out of them entirely new and beautiful." Just so, he shares the decision making process with man.

God seems to want to know what we want to do. He has a broad variety of general commands for us to follow. He has a generally-expressed will for us. And when we are within his general will, he seems pleased to share the decisions about the road ahead with us.

Years ago, I faced a really hard decision. It was one of the three most *crucial* decisions of my life. I fasted about it. I prayed about it. I *agonized* over it. My prayer was that God would *show me what to do*—better yet, do it for me, force the issue. Get me fired from this job, do something so that I will *know* what you want me to do. No answer. This went on for a few weeks, and then one morning in prayer, it came to me just as clear as crystal. I heard no voice, there was nobody in the room, nothing like that. I just suddenly understood. God has shown you all you need to know. What he wants from you now is a *decision*. Once I realized that the decision was mine to

make, the problem dissolved, because the decision—what should be done—was obvious.

I have since come to see that God was capable of making either decision I made work. But he was *not* willing to make the decision *for* me. And I think this is one of the great cop-outs in Christian life. I hear from people all the time. They want God to make all the decisions. They want God to give all the instructions. They want to be right within the middle of God's will, never realizing that they can be in God's will while they are doing what *they* want to do, as long as they are communicating with him about it at the time.

But then came the question, for me, of whether I was making the *right* decision or not. Now, that is an interesting thing. Because when you've come up against this and you say, "Okay. God wants me to decide this; I'll decide... but is it the right decision?" Well, for me that question has been answered. But it wasn't answered with a voice in the night. It was answered by seeing God's *blessing* on what I was *doing*. Think about that. In hindsight, I can look back over the trail and say it was the right decision for me because of the blessing that has come my way, that didn't have to, as I went down this road. Thus, I can feel joy and satisfaction even though I heard no voice from God in the night; even though I haven't had any special message or any special revelation; he didn't come to me in my bedroom and say, "Hey, you did a good job there, Ron." Because, in fact, I just did what I could see I ought to do.

I think this is what Jesus is looking for in men and women. He's looking for people who trust him, who do the right thing without being told; people who test their wants and desires against the Word of God; people who, when left in the dark, and even in chains, will sing songs in the night; people who trust in spite of their feelings, who trust in spite of circumstances.

I often think of Paul and Silas in Philippi, when they were arrested, they were beaten, they were bloody, they were slapped in stocks overnight in the prison, and at midnight—in the middle of the night—they began to sing songs of praise to God. They had no idea what the morning would hold for them. The fact is that, whenever they began to sing those songs in the night, the door to the prison was opened, their stocks were broken, and they went in, the Philippian jailer washed their wounds, fell at his knees, and was converted—his whole house was baptized.

Whenever you see these types of things, you think about the kind of people who have *really served God*. It takes courage to do it, sometimes.

One of the reviewers of Teresa's writings said "This is the way of the pilgrim—to double down, always, on the bet that God is manifest and real[.]" In current terms we would say that the way of the Pilgrim is to go "all in." And this is what Os Guinness was driving at in his book, *Of Two Minds*. I may have my doubts, but I am going to place my trust in him. Like the Hebrew children who faced the fiery furnace told the king:

Daniel 3

KJ2000

¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.

And like Job, who in the midst of his darkest hour said:

Job 13

KJ2000

¹⁵ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him [...]

I don't have to have a good outcome to believe, to trust. That decision does not erase fear. But it gives *meaning* to fear and courage to go forward. Consider what Jesus said at the last supper:

John 15

KJ2000

¹³ Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

¹⁴ You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.

¹⁵ From now on I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

One of the greatest hurts we experience in life is when friends don't do what we expect them to do. Here's the lesson: The problem is not with your friend. It's with your *expectations*. Be careful not to look for approval in the wrong places.

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